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AUTHOR Hogan, John T.
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ABSTRACT

Thousands of college seniors who have returned from their junior year abroad may be enduring "reverse culture shock" or "reentry crisis." Social psychology and sociology, in the form of "sojourn research," has derived a developmental, stage specific model of culture shock and reverse culture shock, similar to the grieving process identified by Kubler-Ross. The college senior moving from the world of school to the world of professional employment experiences a form of culture shock. Many returning academic sojourners' experience the double stress of both reentry into American culture as well as entry into the seemingly alien environments of business and industry. The failure to successfully meet the challenge of reverse culture shock can result in confusion and alienation or geographic expatriation or psychological expatriation. The extreme reaction is a zealous conversion to the new culture, not unlike a cult experience. Unless culture shock is seen as a developmental crisis, a valuable opportunity for growth is being lost. Student affairs professionals can consider the implications of helping students parlay the transitional experience of traveling between cultures into a heightened sense of identity. (Author/WAS)

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Culture-Shock and Reverse-Culture Shock:

Implications for Juniors Abroad and Seniors at Home

Presented by

John T. Hogan, Ph.D.

Assistant Director of Counseling
Providence College
Providence, Rhode Island

American College Personnel Association
Houston, Texas

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Program Abstract

Culture Shock and Reverse Culture Shock: Implications for Juniors Abroad and Seniors at Home

John T. Hogan, Ph.D.
Providence College

Thousands of college seniors who have returned from their junior year abroad may be enduring "reverse culture shock" or "reentry crisis." Social psychology and sociology, in the form of "sojourn research," has derived a developmental, stage specific model of culture shock and reverse culture shock, similar to the grieving process identified by Kubler-Ross. The college senior moving from the world of school to the world of professional employment experiences a form of culture shock. Many returning academic sojourners' experience the double stress of both reentry into American culture as well as entry into the seemingly alien environments of business and industry. The failure to successfully meet the challenge of reverse culture shock can result in confusion and alienation or geographic expatriation or psychological expatriation. The extreme reaction is a zealous conversion to the new culture, not unlike a cult experience.

It is the goal of this presentation to sensitize student affairs professionals to these issues as well as raise questions as to how the needs of this student sub-population can be better served.

Culture-Shock and Reverse-Culture Shock:

Implications for Juniors Abroad and Seniors at Home

Introduction

The dramatic return of the Hostages from Iran and the subsequent follow-up stories made all of America poigantly aware of the reverse culture shock suffered by the Returnees. They had to debrief and readjust. Close observers of this intensely emotional chapter of American history are aware that each individual was deeply affected by both the captive experience as well as the process of reentry into American life. They probably will never be the same, either for the better or worse. A similar, but less extreme, process may be endured by thousands of college seniors who have returned from their "junior year abroad." Called "reverse culture shock" or "reentry crisis," this is an under-researched phenomenon at the opposite end of the continuum from the "culture shock" experiencedupon entry into a new culture. Although successful reentry is the raison d'etre of the academic sojourn, an extensive review of the literature between 1950 and 1980 revealed only 20 articles dealing specifically with the post-sojourn experience (Bochner et al., 1980). An added dimension is the fact that many more of today's liberal arts seniors are deciding to enter the job market rather than persuing, at least

immediately, graduate education. This means that many of the seniors returning from abroad are facing the double stress of both reentry into American culture, their college, family, and friendships as well as the new culture shock of entry into the world of professional employment. The failure to successfully meet the challenge of reverse culture shock can result in confusion and alienation or geographic expatriation or psychological expatriation. The extreme reaction is a zealous conversion to the alien culture, not unlike a cult experience.

It is the goal of this presentation, to sensitize student affairs professionals to these issues as well as raise questions as to how the needs of this student sub-population can be better served.

The Problem

"Reentry crisis" is experienced by all sojourners, whether tourist, student, international manager, peace corps volunteer, or college professor. While the tourist's interactions with a host culture are usually superficial, not resulting in true culture shock (Brein & David, 1971), all these travelers have shared the experience quoted by Cleveland et al. (1960):

> "In my home town there are probably many people who still don't realize that the world is round. I remember when we got home from Moscow people asked me how it was there, but before I could open my mouth, they would begin telling me how Uncle Charlie had broken his arm. They profess interest in things abroad, but they really aren't interested." (p. 25)

The student describing her readjustment problems in 1963, as follows, is not unlike many of her compatriots twenty years later:

> "I just can't seem to get adjusted back here, I just can't seem to settle down to work. I don't know what it is, but once you've lived abroad I guess you can't really come back...at least not if you're an artist...Of course, I suppose eventually I'll be able to work this all out...I'd like to keep on doing some creative work here, but it's very hard for artists to

> get by in America. I guess it's obvious that I won't be able to stay in Missouri; there is just no place out here for artists. I'll have to move to New York, and that's so expensive, and there are big disadvantages to living there, but really that's the only art center in the United States," (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963, p. 33)

She may have returned abroad as many other artists, Fulbrighters, and former Peace Corps volunteers. Still other returnees come home in body only as the Gullahorns describe: "...in American universities one often finds cliques of Europophiles - consisting of those possessing the distinction of having lived abroad and of never having returned home psychologically" (p.44). One senior shared with the author the concern that some of her peers came back "anti-American." In a study of Asian graduate students about to return home from the University of Hawaii, a strong negative attitude was reflected toward both the physical environment and the political conditions of the home countries (Bochner et al.). Many expatriate managers, upon returning to the States, find "The American workstyles and lifestyle...simply too hectic for them" (Howard, 1980, p. 842).

Lest only a negative picture of the coming home process

be painted, three very different styles of readjustment have been described by Foust et al. (1981) as "alienation," "reversion," and "integration." The cases just cited reflect the experience of the "alienated" returnees. At the opposite extreme, the "reversion" coping style implies rejection of all changes acquired abroad. The optimum style, "integration," "...is that of the returnee who uses the return home as an opportunity for learning and change. The transition is challenging but exciting, as returnees try to integrate aspects of their foreign cultural experience into their life at home" (p. 24). Culture shock and reverse culture shock are viewed by some as a potential experience to discover self, to grow and transcend the boundaries of "ethnocentrism, Chauvinism, and nationalism" (Adler, 1975, p. 23).

Yet cultural entry and reentry continues to be problematic despite its positive potential. That entry into a foreign environment is difficult is reflected by the fact that adjustment problems were responsible for 60% of prematurely returning Peace Corps Volunteers prior to 1963. (Brein & David). Such a high figure could be the result of the extreme cultural polarity of the third world assignments of the Peace

Corps. On the other hand, American corporations report that one third of all personnel transferred overseas prematurely return because of problems with adjustment (Lanier, 1979). Despite his cultural transition model of growth and self-awareness, Adler (1975) admits that, "Obviously, there are far too many examples of failure, total withdrawal, breakdown, and complete inability to cope with new experiential demands" (p. 20). Some returning students report a vacillation between "alienation," "regression," and "integration." A casual remark at a party about jobs for American women in Japan as English teachers or models can cause a senior, home from Europe, to forego on-campus interviews as she throws her time and energy into planning a new adventure.

An "International Career" is the dream of many seniors home from abroad. College placement officers have the painful task of asking the eager idealist why an American corporation would send them overseas until they have a proven record of achievement for five or six years here in the U.S. or why a foreign company would hire an inexperienced beginner over a skilled local national. They would be even more bewildered to

realize that many executives are reluctant to accept overseas assignments because of the perceived personal and professional reentry difficulties (Adler, 1981; Harvey, 1982; Cagney, 1975; Howard, 1980). Executive returnees are quoted as follows:

> "Going home is a harder move. The foreign move has the excitment of being new...more confusing, but exciting. Reentry is frightening...I'll be happy to be home...I really wonder if I can adjust back. There's some kind of traumatic reaction to it. It evidenced itself in my insomnia. There was something there...waking up at 4:00 a.m." (Adler, 1981, p. 53).

American faculty returning from overseas grants have reported relatively minor adjustment difficulties. However, many express annoyance and frustration with the loss of the professional status and time for reflection and dialogue they experience upon return to the American campus (Gullahorn & Gullahorn). Such reactions are more indicative of "role shock" rather than typical culture shock (Brein & David). Even the seasoned international sojourner may experience a surprising period of adjustment to campus routine after only a domestic sabatical. Although previous culture shocks do not immunize against future shocks, they may be less severe and of shorter duration (Foster, 1965).

All of the experiences cited above are examples of the culture shock phenomenon in reverse which all sojourners experience to varying degrees. Cross-cultural confusion suggests a wide spectrum of feelings including alienation, anomie, helplessness, irritability, confusion, disillusionment, and aimlessness. Brein and David summarize the variety of reactions:

> In some instances a sojourner may never quite fully recover from his initial difficulties, whereas others may experience little more than a mild annoyance with no appreciable decrease in adjustment. Also, some sojourners may encounter few adjustment difficulties upon returning home, while others may undergo a rather severe reentry crisis. (p. 216)

The Process

Since "culture shock" was coined by Oberg (1958), the sojourner literature has attempted to define the phenomenon and describe the process. In examining the experience of the college senior home from abroad, this presentation will use the term "senior shock" and add an additional "U" curve to what has been described already by the Gullahorns (1963) as a double "U" ("U U") adjustment process.

Culture shock has been variously defined as a disease

(Foster, 1965; Oberg, 1958), a problem of adaption and adjustment (Lysagaard, 1955; Gullahorn & Gullahorn); feelings of disorientation and helplessness (Bock, 1970), anxiety resulting from the loss of familiar stimuli and cues (Hall, 1959; Oberg 1960), fatigue (Guthrie, 1966), as well as cognitive dissonance resulting from discrepancies in expectations or roles (Gullahorn & Gullahorn). Travel outside of the country is not necessary to experience culture shock. Parole from prison, leaving the military, marriage, divorce, unemployment, mid-life career change are all "transitional experiences" which share common processes, difficulties, and consequences (Adler, 1975). The stage specific model of grief identified in the death and dying literature (Imara, 1974) is remarkably similar to the culture shock processes categorized as temporal phases of adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955, Gullahorn & Gullahorn) or as stages in the process of cultural transition (Oberg, 1960; Adler, 1975).

The "U" Curve hypothesis of Lysgaard and the "W" ("U U") hypothesis of the Gullahorns tend to dominate any description of the culture shock process. In the "U" phenomenon, the sojourner experiences a drop in adjustment after entering a

foreign culture, but after a bottoming out, slowly adjusts and reaches a point of satisfactory adjustment. The "W" curve, which is really a "U U" curve, recognizes that another period of decline in adjustment occurs upon return to the home culture with still another period of recovery and subsequent adjustment. While these paradigms represent a roller coaster experience over a period of time, they do not specifically acknowledge the individual experiential differences and outcomes that personal accounts indicate (Brein & David). Nor do these two models indicate the feelings and behavior experienced or "the more encompassing and progressive changes in identity which can ensue from the culture shock process" (Adler, 1975, p. 15).

Oberg (1958) was the first to develop a more comprehensive model explaining the total process of culture shock and reverse culture shock with the following stages: (1) Incubation: the sojourner is fascinated by the new culture and may even be euphoric. (2) Hostility and/or Depression: the sojourner must face the crises resulting from even the smallest dissonances in daily activities, such as bathing and eating. Everyone seems rude and totally unreasonable. (3) Adjustment: the traveler either begins to understand the foreign culture and

regains his/her sense of humor or becomes stuck in extreme dissatisfaction with the host culture. (4) Biculturalism: the host culture is seen as having both positive and negative aspects; the sojourner behaves within the cultural norms of the alien social system. (5) Reverse Culture Shock: the returnee must re-engage with his/her education or profession, peers, and family. An unsuccessful reentry may pass from euphoria to alienation and rejection leading to either geographic or psychological expatriation (Pedersen, 1976; Gullahorn & Gullahorn).

The "transitional experience" model of Adler (1975) implies an upward progression from a state of low self-and cultural awareness to a potential end-result of self sufficiency. The paradigm begins with the excitement and euphoria of Contact, progresses to the depression and withdrawal of Disintegration, moves toward angry rejection of the alien culture during Reintegration, climbs to the self-assured flexibility of Autonomy, and arrives at the stage of Independence with the acceptance and enjoyment of social, psychological, and cultural differences. The person who is "independent" understands the

stages he/she has been through, is again emotionally intact, and is "capable of again having preconceptions, assumptions, values, and attitudes challenged" (Adler, 1975, p. 18). This is a developmental model that suggests that cross cultural experience can be truly maturing in the sense of adult identity rather, than just being an enhancement of the resume. Adler (1975) suggests that many Americans do not achieve the depth of learning possible from cross-cultural transitional experiences, because they feel that they themselves do not have a culture; they do not realize how respondent they are to their environment and are therefore prone to an extreme degree of shock when their cues are changed or are taken away. The underlying premise of this analysis of the process of culture shock is that conflict, change, and movement lead to the temporary disintegration of personality which is then an occasion for an upward thrust to higher levels. It is also a time of extreme vulnerability! Werkman (1979) reminds us that not everyone who sojourns during adolescence achieves trancendent independence when he states that,

> The need to abandon intense friendships and cultural supports frequently results in disturbing feelings characteristic of the grieving process. Though most returning Americans seem

> to make a good surface adjustment to this country, that adjustment may at times, cover over a host of barely contained feelings of uncertainty, alienation, anger, and disappointment...(p. 182)

Although this a description of the problems encountered by American youth who return to America after extended periods overseas, it all the more raises the question of what makes an experience of vulnerability into a maturing event since the extension of time in a culture does not seem to make a difference.

Senior Shock

With more college seniors seeking to enter the job market rather than graduate school and the restrictions in the availability of entry level professional job opportunities, it is reasonable to expect that more than ever before seniors returning from their junior year abroad are facing the maturing movement from the world of school to the world of work. In terms of a temporal adjustment model, the returning overseas student entering the job search process experiences a triple "U" curve ("UUU" curve) rather than the double "U" suggested by the Gullahorns. The ups and downs of the second U are the reverse culture shock of returning to the American College

campus. The third curve represents the hills and valley of yet another period of adjustment and potential growth, "senior shock." The previous experience of culture shock does not immunize against its reoccurance, although growth from one experience may soften the intensity and duration of the subsequent (Pedersen; Foster; Adler, 1975).

Culture shock has been estimated to take from 3 to 6 months minimum depending on the resilience of the traveler (Foster). This would mean that the returning senior may be suffering from reverse culture shock until December at the minimum. It would seem that reverse culture shock and senior shock could easily over-lap as the peer culture is busying itself for departure with preparation increasingly beginning in the fall of senior year, if not in the spring of junior year.

Senior shock is characterized by movement from stage (1) Naivete/Denial: "there is no problem; I'm all set," to (2) Disillusionment/Negativism: realization that employment is not automatic with a college degree, to (3) Perspective: thought replaces reaction, and finally to stage (4) Committment/Reorganization: job readiness is characterized by real goals,

positive feelings and confidence, integrity, self worth, persistence, and resourcefulness (McGrath, 1983). Failure to move through this process can result in the senior being unemployed, under-employed, clinging to college, or even clinging to home and family.

The student who returns from abroad has had to come to grips with an alien social-cultural environment. If he/she was unsuccessful and became frozen in hostility to the host culture, then reentry to home is a relief. However, the questions remains whether this negative experience in moving across cultural gaps will inhibit the cross-cultural transition from college to professional employment. If, on the other hand, the student was ultimately very gratified with his/her foreign experience, reentry may mean the abrupt removal of potent reinforcers. Students who have had no major geographical moves prior to an overseas experience tend to be "lost" when they come home, realizing slowly that subtle changes occurred in their expectations and values. Those who had not found either their own identity, the immature adolescent, or their social identity, e.g. art students or minority students, become zealous converts to the security and prestige of their

special role in the new culture (Gullahorn & Gullahorn). It is a fact that a large number of Peace Corps volunteers return to live in their host cultures on a long term basis (David, 1975). It is a question how many other sojourners are experiencing alienation and hostility because they do not have the opportunity to return to the land of their dreams.

Remedies

Remedies to culture shock for the academic sojourner do not appear in the literature. It might be assumed that the organizers of the programs that have flourished during the last twenty years have developed mechanisms to move the student through the predictable manisfestations of initial adjustment. However, Adler (1975) believes that unless culture shock is seen and reacted to as a developmental crisis of identity, a valuable opportunity for growth is being lost. He calls for training and simulation models as well as counseling strategies that are developmental rather than adjustive.

The only program actively preparing students to reenter their home cultures are seminars for foreign students at the

East-West Center, University of Hawaii, (Brein & Van Buren, 1974; Foust et al.). Included in this program are both Asian and Pacific graduate students as well as U.S. mainland students. The later group have been found to have the most severe reentry problems because they do not expect any difficulties. The seminars consist of a series of lectures, simulations, and role plays. The premise of this training is the concept that constructive worry in advance is the best preparation for stressful events. This approach was developed by Janis (1958) and applied to surgical patients. The results of knowing the basic facts and walking through the process mentally has resulted in less post-operative emotional stress and less demand for medication (Egbert et al., 1964). Similarly, Brislin's reentry workshops alert returnees to the potential dissonances in the personal, social, cultural, and political arenas. Foust et al. refer to specific training materials used at the East-West Center that could be applicable to other programs. The seminars are often the only formal opportunity for the participants to learn about the reentry process, as one states, " 'I've learned so much, I never dreamed that there were all these things that can happen when people

move from culture to culture' " (Brislin & VanBuren, p. 24).

Although there have been calls for more intensive research of all aspects of the sojourner experience including what happens to the returnee, very little has occured (Jacobson, 1963; Gullahorn & Gullahorn; Werkman, 1979). Researchers should also consider why there continues to be so little examination of this area despite the recognition of the need twenty years ago. One of the few exceptions to this lacuna has been extensive studies of the total sojourner experience of Swedish businessmen in 25 countries conducted by the Business and Social Research Institute, Stockholm (Torbiorn, 1982).

Conclusion

Given the nature of the transitional process of the senior year in college, from the world of school to the world of work, it is easy to hypothesize that the senior returning from a "high" experience abroad will have trouble settling down to the process of moving out of a world of which he/she is questioning even being a real part. At least some of the returning international students may have a combination of ambivalent attitudes toward job and peer relations, qualified positive attitudes toward returning to family, and negative attitudes toward physical and political environments of their home countries. Stated simply, the returning academic sojourner may range from being mildly mixed up to being lost, alienated, and hostile as he/she encounters the flurry of placement jitters that washes-through a senior class. Because of these negative possibilities, the goal of international education as well as all transitional experiences needs to be clarified as more than just increased understanding of other cultures but rather the paradoxical experience T.S. Eliot describes,

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

The purpose of this presentation has been to sensitize student affairs professionals to the needs of this sub-population. Since multinational corporations have found it necessary both to carefully consider who goes overseas as well as to provide support services when the expatriate manager returns (Torbiorn), the following questions seem appropriate for educators to consider: What are the implications of more intensive screening of applicants to international programs? What skills and/or personal qualities are needed to successfully move from one culture to another and then back again? What should international students be taught about the process they are either experiencing or going to experience? What can the college administrator or counselor do to help students parlay the transitional experience of traveling between cultures into a heightened sense of identity? What special support services can or should colleges provide to ease the returning international student back into the college environment and simultaneously into the exit process of senior year?

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